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UNSECTARIAN NOTES

ON

FREE WILL,

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH,

GOOD WORKS,

AND

PREDESTINATION & ELECTION,

WITH

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL SEASONS
FROM THE "PILGRIM'S PROGRESS."

By RICHARD HERRING,

Author of "Personal Recollections of the Rev. George Croly, E.L.D.,"
&c.

LONDON :

LONGMANS, GREEN & CO.,

38 to 41, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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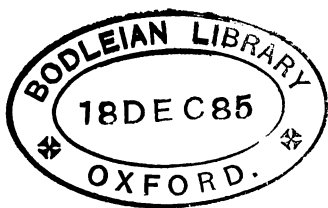
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Free Will.

“No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him.”—*John vi. 44.*

If the soul of man had now its original rectitude there needed no more to influence the will than the illumination of the understanding ; but in the depraved soul of the fallen man there is a rebellion of the will against the right dictates of the understanding, a carnal mind which is enmity itself to the divine light and law.

It is therefore requisite that there be a work of grace wrought upon the will which is here called drawing. “No man can come to me except the Father who hath sent me draw him.” And this is the case of all mankind. No man can persuade himself to come up to the terms of the Gospel, except the Father draw him ; that is, work a change in the will whereby a new bias is given to the soul by which it inclines to God. This is not to be called a physical impulse, for it lies out of the road of nature, but He that formed the spirit of man within him by His creating power, and fashions the hearts of men by His providential influence, knows how to new-mould the soul, and to alter its bent and temper, making it conformable to Himself and His own will, without doing any wrong to its natural liberty.

Thus the 10th Article of the English Church concisely observes: "The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works to faith and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God, by Christ, preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will."

To some it might appear that the condition of trial in which we are accustomed to regard man as being placed in the world is by this Article reduced to a mere absurdity. But such is not the case. Man always retains what we are accustomed to denote the moral choice, and therefore of necessity must be regarded as a responsible being. Indeed, when we look at mankind generally, and see the capabilities each possesses of directing and controlling his thoughts to any particular study or branch of science, independently of such choice of occupation as he is enabled to avail himself of according to peculiar taste and circumstances, it cannot be difficult to understand that man has also the power of choosing—if he feels the insufficiency of all other dependence to uphold and comfort him amidst the various trials and difficulties which beset and perplex his course—the service of his Great Creator and Preserver, the Lord of Heaven and Earth.

But this is little more than the work of natural religion. He is not yet removed from the power of Satan unto God; the consolations of the Gospel are not his; he has yet to understand how that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of

God, for they are foolishness unto him ; he is still blinded as it were with the things of the world, like as when the mind being absorbed in the deep study of any object of investigation or reflection, becomes not only unconscious of the course of time but even of things passing immediately before the eyes. Such is the condition of man unchanged by grace. And "can the Ethiopian change his skin" that is by nature black, "or the leopard his spots" that are even woven into the skin ? So is it morally impossible for us to remove the deformity of the soul, Sin, in which we were shapen and which is natural to us, by any power of our own. But the same almighty grace that is able to change the Ethiopian's skin is never wanting to those who in a sense of need seek it earnestly and improve it faithfully.

Thus do the Scriptures, in like manner with the Article, declare it to be impossible for us to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us. For as all divine discoveries are made alone through Him, so is it through Christ alone that all divine powers are exerted, giving us the will and working with us when we have that good will.

"Ye have not chosen me," saith our Lord, "but I have chosen you." Again, "Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more *can* ye except ye abide in me."

The text says, "No man cometh unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him," thus implying that God necessarily does draw men. Not by any undue influence driving them into His service

whether they would or no, but by such endearing and gentle means as overcome them with kindness.

"I drew them with the cords of a man," with such cords as men draw with that have a principle of humanity, dealing with them as men in an equitable rational way, "with bands of love." Thus God deals with us, drawing us with loving kindness as it were into covenant with Himself. And when Christ is thus set before us in the character and relationship which He bears—when His love is poured into our hearts and we realise the fact of His dying upon the Cross as a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world—then is it impossible for us not to come unto Him, and to recognise in Him the Way, the Truth and the Life, as that which affords the surest hope of a happy death and a joyful resurrection. Just as when by the aid of natural light the bodily eye cannot help perceiving the object placed immediately before it; so by the aid of that spiritual light, imparted by the grace of God shed abroad in the heart, it is impossible to resist such conviction of the completeness of the plan of salvation as that which enabled the Apostle Paul, and those servants of the Most High who have since followed in his steps, to meet the close of their earthly career with calmness and assurance that there was laid up for them "a crown of glory which the Lord the righteous judge shall give them at that day." But very possibly there may be some who say—then I have no need to exert myself, since it is impossible for man by his own strength and good works to succeed in pleasing God. I shall therefore cease to trouble myself with any thoughts at all about religion.

until, if such should happen, I am called to do so. But stop ; remember, whosoever thou art that thus repliest, that He who hath said, " No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him " hath also left us the assurance, " whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name he will give it you." And again, " He will give " even " his Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Thus the means of grace are open alike to all. " Search the scriptures " is the all-important command, and to obey it the foremost duty. " Pray without ceasing," or, in other words, acknowledge God and seek His favour at all times, is an injunction scarcely less necessary, if not of paramount importance, especially when we carry our thoughts to the services of the congregation and couple with it the further assurance of our Lord, " that if two shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them."

But still more, when can we look with greater fervency to the attainment of growth in grace than at the time of the celebration of Holy Communion? Then, indeed, if we approach with that suitable frame of mind which alone becomes a participation in such Holy Mysteries, and with a resolute determination to strive to the utmost against the sins which most easily beset us, then most surely may we firmly ground our hopes upon the Saviour's assurance that—" Whosoever eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him." And although in our after course and conversation with the world,

we feel, as St. Paul saith, that "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would," yet, he adds, "If ye be led of the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit, ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

Justification by Faith.

“Therefore, it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.”—*Romans* iv. 16.

WHATEVER is revealed to us in the Scriptures must necessarily be important as coming from God. But there are some things more especially so, and we judge them according to the prominence they hold. The doctrine of justification by faith is one of those. For, independent of various allusions to it in the Law and the Prophets, as well as its constant repetition in the New Testament, in that small book we find so large a proportion as two whole Epistles—those to the Romans and the Galatians—written apparently for the especial purpose of establishing the doctrine which beyond all dispute is the most momentous to which the mind of man can be directed. By the Church of England it is thus set forth in the 11th Article:—“We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort.” First, then, let us consider the doctrine itself, and secondly, its importance.

What is meant by justification?

The act of a judge judicially declaring righteous. It is not merely pardon, for the idea of pardon is very distinct from, and very inferior to, the idea of justification. Conceive for instance a prisoner charged with some crime, and brought before the tribunal of his country. He is found guilty of the crime laid to his charge, but he is afterwards pardoned. He escapes the punishment of his guilt, but he does not escape the imputation of his guilt; he is not justified. The judge looks upon that man as a guilty man, and he must for ever look upon himself in the same light. Nothing can replace the pardoned criminal precisely in the same position in society which he occupied before he committed, or was convicted of, a crime.

But justification is a judicial declaration that a party against whom an accusation is brought is free from all blame.

Justification before God is a sentence of acquittal at His righteous tribunal.

Had an accusation been brought against Adam, for instance, before his fall, his conduct tried by God's holy law, would have been found blameless, and he would have been justified.

Had the trials of the Lord Jesus at the earthly tribunals before which He was arraigned been conducted on any principle of equity, He would have been justified, for there was "no fault in Him."

In order, therefore, to the justification of any intelligent being in the sight of God (independently of the method revealed in the Gospel), it is absolutely necessary that his whole conduct bear a strict comparison with the requirements of the Divine law. He

must have fulfilled it perfectly in thought, word and deed throughout his whole life. For God cannot lower the standard of His law to meet what is sometimes termed a sincere, though deficient obedience. To suppose this is to suppose Himself capable of change—capable of ceasing to be “holy, just, and good,” and consequently of causing misery and confusion to overwhelm the universe. It follows necessarily that man cannot be justified, as the Article expresses it “by His own works or deservings ;” or, according to the Apostle, “by the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified.” To say nothing of direct and aggravated transgressions innumerable, his very best acts of obedience fall very far short, indeed, of the perfect law of love, because all men are sinners and offenders against God. “There is none righteous, no, not one.” “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ; and “if thou, Lord, mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand ?” “Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified.” “Every mouth must be stopped and all the world be found guilty before God.” It is only when man is ignorant of the character of God and of his obligations to Him that he thinks his sins few and trivial. Even those who through grace have been constituted the children of God, were previously “the children of wrath even as others.” It is impossible, therefore, that any man can be justified by an inherent righteousness—a righteousness which he has not, and which, in consequence of his coming far short of the demands of a law that requireth uninterrupted and per-

fect obedience, he cannot attain. For "whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point," saith St. James, "he is guilty of all." But now without the law the righteousness of God is made manifest—"we are *accounted* righteous." This single word of the Article at once indicates the whole amazing expedient devised by infinite wisdom and executed by infinite love and power. "We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," who was delivered for our offences—delivered up as a sin offering by the Father. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all." "He was made sin for us though he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Sin was imputed to Him that righteousness might be imputed to us. He, a righteous person, was accounted, reckoned, and dealt with in infinite justice as if He had been a sinner, in order that we sinners might be accounted, reckoned and dealt with in infinite mercy as if we had been righteous persons. He became what we are, that we might become what He is. His merit is accepted of God instead of our own. So that Christ is now the righteousness of all them that do truly believe in Him. He, for them, paid their ransom by His death. He, for them, fulfilled the law in His life. So that now in Him, and by Him, every true Christian may be called a fulfiller of the law, forasmuch as that which their infirmity lacked, Christ hath supplied.

Thus, then, justification is a gracious act of God, whereby through the righteousness of Christ's satisfaction imputed He freely remits to the believing sinner the guilt and punishment of his sins, and through the righteousness of Christ's perfect obedience imputed, He accounts him righteous, and accepts him into love and favour and into eternal life. This is justification, which is the very sum and pith of the whole Gospel.

But because an all-sufficient remedy is provided and freely offered, it does not necessarily follow that men are thereby justified. Facts prove that they are not. What then is the means which puts us in possession of the blessing? How do we pass from a condition of condemnation in consequence of sin, into a condition of acceptance "in the Beloved," and peace with God through Him?

The consideration upon which it is done, and the condition upon which it is offered, are two very different things. The one is a dispensation of God's mercy, in which He has regard to His own attributes, to the honour of His laws, and His government of the world; the other is the method in which He applies that to us, in such a manner that it may have such ends as are both perfective of human nature and suitable to an infinitely holy Being to pursue.

We must never mix these two together, or imagine that the condition upon which justification is offered to us is the consideration that moves God, as if our holiness, faith, or obedience were the moving cause of our justification. It is "by faith"—not as a work by which we deserve justification, nor yet as a meritorious condition, but as a mere instrument

by which justification is laid hold of and appropriated to ourselves. "By grace ye are saved," saith St. Paul, "through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Or, as we find from our text, "It is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed."

The first covenant being a covenant of works was not sure, but through man's failure the benefits designed by it were cut off, and, therefore, the more effectually to ascertain and ensure the conveyance of the new covenant, there is another way found out, not by works (were it so the promise would not be sure, because of the continual frailty and infirmity of the flesh) but by faith, which receives all from Christ and acts in a continual dependence upon Him as the great Trustee of our salvation, in whose keeping it is safe.

Thus, neither sacraments, ordinances, Christian graces, or works of any kind are conjoined with faith in the matter of justifying. For, as saith the Homily, "St. Paul declareth nothing upon the behalf of man concerning his justification, but only a true and lively faith, which, nevertheless, is the gift of God, and not man's only work without God; and yet that faith doth not shut out repentance, hope, love, dread, and the fear of God, to be joined with faith in every man that is justified, but it shutteth them out from the office of justifying. So that although they be all present together in him that is justified, yet they justify not altogether. Neither doth faith shut out the justice of our good works, but it doth not shut them, so that we may not do them to this intent, to be made just by doing of them."

Thus, then, we have entire Scriptural grounds for this doctrine, which is indeed the fundamental doctrine of the Christian Religion, for no Church which faithfully maintains it in all its majestic simplicity and consolatory fulness can be in any grievous error as to minor particulars. "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings."

Let us now consider its importance in the light of the paragraph with which the Article concludes, "Wherefore that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort." By the phrase "by faith only" we are not to understand faith as it is separated from the other evangelical graces and virtues, but faith as opposed to the Mosaical Law. "We are justified by faith," saith St. Paul, "without the deeds of the law." And St. James treats of the same matter, but with this great difference, that though he says expressly that a man is justified by his works and not by faith only, yet he does not say by the works of the Law, so that he does not at all contradict St. Paul, the works that he mentions, not being the circumcision or ritual observances of Abraham, but his offering up his son Isaac, which St. Paul had reckoned a part of the faith of Abraham. Thus we are enabled to obtain a true notion of the faith that justifies—that it is not a bare believing, such as devils are capable of, but *such* believing as exerteth itself in good works. "For without works is dead." Not only as void of all those operations which are the proofs of spiritual life, but as unavailable to justify

and save. For true faith is as the root bringing forth the fruit of good works. What charge then can be more unfounded than that which has often been cast upon the doctrine of justification by faith as encouraging licentiousness? This is so far from being the case that there can be no real holiness, and no overcoming motive felt to its practice, till man is in a state of acceptance with God. It is then only that, being created anew in the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, he is brought under influences and motives which lead him to devote all that he is, and all that he possesses, to adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour, by a conversation becoming the Gospel, by observing all things whatsoever Christ has commanded, by doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with his God. Very rightly, therefore, does the Article add in conclusion, that this doctrine is "most wholesome and very full of comfort;" most wholesome as a revelation of the Divine will, exactly adapted to the necessities of guilty and impotent sinners; most wholesome also because when practically received it quickens and sustains that spiritual life within which shall issue in eternal glory. "In strictness of words we are not justified till the final sentence is pronounced, till upon our death we are solemnly acquitted of our sins, and admitted into the presence of God. Yet, as a man who is in that state that must end in condemnation is said to be condemned already, and the wrath of God to abide upon him, though he be not yet adjudged to it; so on the contrary a man in that state which must end in the full enjoyment of God is said now to be justified and to be at peace

with God, because he not only has the promises of that state now belonging to him when he does perform the conditions required, but is likewise receiving daily marks of God's favour, the protection of His providence, the ministry of Angels, and the inward assistances of His grace and Spirit."

Thus the doctrine is also very full of comfort, as relieving us from the slavish round of self-justifying duties—the torturing suspense lest after we have done all, we may still be found wanting—and as bringing us at once to One who has power enough and grace enough to pardon us fully and to love us freely, as introducing us to a peace which passeth all understanding. But above all "it is very full of comfort;" while removing all fear as to the past it dissipates all anxiety for the future. Who shall now lay anything to our charge? If "it is God that justifieth," who shall condemn?

Good Works.

“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works; show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.”—*James* ii. 17, 18.

WHEN the penitent thief upon the Cross, convinced by the conduct of our Lord amidst the sufferings which He endured, that at least He had done nothing amiss, was at last by the Spirit of Grace constrained to cry, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom,” and thereupon received the acknowledgment of Christ’s favour towards him in the answer to his prayer: “Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise,” he was justified. Believing in the all-sufficient power of Christ to save, the hitherto impenitent sinner was justified from all his sins through faith alone. But if that man had lived, though justified freely without works, he would have shown himself careful to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, who “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” He would not have needed the admonition of our text, “Faith without works is dead,” but like as Lazarus when restored to life exhibited that unquestionable vitality which charac-

terises physical existence, so he being raised from the death of sin, and restored to the favour of God through a true consciousness of Christ's merits, would henceforth have shown the vitality and reality of his faith in the fruits of holiness and love, according as we find it set forth in the 12th Article of the English Church: "Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruits of faith and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment, yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by the fruit." Let us now consider in the first place the nature of Good Works, and then, secondly, their necessity. It is most essential that we should have a clear definition of Good Works, *i.e.*, of their nature, and in what they consist, especially since in our dealings with society even in the present day, multitudes are found who, like the Pharisees of old, instead of delighting in such good works that they who see them may glorify God, content themselves rather with a desire above all things to obtain the praise of men; aiming only at such performances as appear the most likely to draw forth from surrounding eye-witnesses whatever their affected pre-eminence and superiority needs, to be effectually gratified. "All their works they do," said our Lord, "for to be seen of men."

But there are also very many, and those not hypocrites, who conceive that because they are considered by mankind generally to act religiously, that therefore they have no need to fear the judgment of God

—who imagine that because they maintain a respectable position in the opinions of their fellow men, not only in consequence of strict integrity in business and their general uprightness and demeanour towards society, but also perhaps arising from the conduct and management which they exercise in their houses and with especial reference to their families, that, therefore, they shall be looked upon as favourably by Him who “searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.” But great, indeed, is such delusion. Their duty truly they may have performed, but it has been only for some accruing advantage to themselves—for self or self-gratification. If we ascertain their actuating motives we find them entirely without love to God, or faith in Christ. And “without faith” we are alike assured that “it is impossible to please God,” as it is certain that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” Good works, pleasing and acceptable to God are alone the fruits of that “faith which worketh by love.” And, as St. Paul saith, “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” No external privileges nor profession will avail to our acceptance with God without a sincere faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. There is but one way of justification and salvation, and that is by believing in Him, which faith is not an idle, inactive, inoperative faith, but such a faith as worketh by love, both towards God and towards men, in obedience to all the commandments of God; yet is not the soul justified, nor shall it stand righteous before God in and for this obedience, which neither is faith, nor goeth before it, but followeth it as the true, proper, and necessary effect of it.

Thus, although St. Paul was inspired to show that faith alone justifies, so was St. James in like manner to show the necessity of good works, and that of true faith alone can they proceed. "What doth it profit," he asks, "though a man say he hath faith and have not works? Can faith save him?" A bare profession may sometimes seem to be profitable, to gain the good opinion of those who are truly good, and it may produce in some cases the good things of this world; but what profit will it be for any to gain the world and to lose their souls? What doth it profit? Can faith save him? All things must be accounted profitable or unprofitable, according as they tend to forward or hinder our salvation. And thus above every other consideration we should be careful so to take account of faith, as that which doth not profit if it does not save. Faith, like love and charity, is an operative principle, and in order that we may discover that neither would otherwise be good for anything, the Apostle proceeds to show how it looks for one to pretend to be charitable, who yet never does any works of charity, and thus leads us to infer what sense there is in pretending to have faith without the proper and necessary fruits of it. "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, 'Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,' notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works is dead, being alone."

Thus we see that the faith which justifies is manifested by its fruits—that the signs and proofs of its reality and life are obedience to God's command-

ments, and consequently that unless true faith and love be at the very root, no good works can be pleasing and acceptable to God.

Of the second consideration as to the necessity of good works, we may also gather much from the language of St. James in concluding the chapter, showing the error and folly of those who boast of faith without works, to which we have already referred. "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." As the body without the soul has no action nor beauty, but becomes a loathsome carcase; even so a bare profession without works is equally useless, loathsome, and offensive. Or, as life may be without nourishment, but nourishment cannot be without life; so a man having faith must needs be nourished with good works, otherwise neither faith nor works can save him, for "faith without works is dead." Numerous passages of Scripture exist showing the necessity of good works, and that they are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, such as the assurance of our Lord Himself: "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you;" and that, "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another;" again, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." And St. Paul saith, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love." For, in another place we find, "not the hearers of the law are justified before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." Although many such passages as these proving the necessity of good works occur throughout the Sacred Volume, yet perhaps none can

carry with them greater weight and importance than the wonderful account which our Lord Himself has given of the last judgment, "When he will come in his glory, and all his holy angels with him, and before him shall be gathered all nations, whom he will separate one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats," not placing the rich, the learned, and the noble, on His right hand, and the poor, the unlearned, and the despised on His left, but by their works alone marking the distinction,—“they that have done good, and they that have done evil;” welcoming the former with the acknowledgment, “Come, ye blessed,” but to the latter addressing the stern dismissal, “Depart, ye cursed; these to everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.” Then, we are assured, all good works will be remembered and brought forward with the best construction that can be put upon them, yea, not even the least, not a cup of cold water shall be overlooked, but interpreted to the very most advantage.

Thus the sole rule of Christ's judgment at that great day in the dispensation of rewards and punishments will be according as our works agree or disagree with the word of God. A bare profession of “Lord, Lord,” if we do not the things which He requires, will then avail us nothing. The sure foundation upon a rock is not to the hearer, but to the doer. As we read in the Revelation of St. John, “I am he which searcheth the reins and the heart; and I will give unto each one of you according to your works.”

But, finally, while thus viewing the nature and neces-

sity of Good Works, we must not be unmindful of the opportunity, which in like manner is afforded, of "proving our own selves whether we be in the faith"—in that faith which constraineth us to live not to self but "unto Him that loved us and gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity"—in that faith which, working by love, is all in all in Christianity—in that faith which enables us to "walk worthy of our calling," "living soberly, righteously and godly in this present world," "looking for *that* blessed hope."

Predestination and Election.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will.”—*Ephesians* i. 3-5.

WHEN the inspired Psalmist, contemplating God's omniscience, exclaimed, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Psalm cxxxix. 6), he did not on that account reject the doctrine, but, on the contrary, continued meditating thereupon. And such likewise should be our course with reference to whatever is revealed in the Scriptures. It may appear impossible for us to understand entirely everything which we find there; nevertheless being assured that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (1 Tim. iii. 16), “written for our learning” (Rom. xv. 4), it plainly becomes our duty, for purposes of consolation and guidance, to meditate devoutly and sincerely upon all that has been written.

The doctrine of Predestination and Election contained in the 17th Article of the Church of England, is one surrounded with difficulty, but we are bound to give it the fullest consideration, not merely as an

Article of that Church, but as it is indeed the doctrine of Holy Scripture. It is this, "Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) He hath constantly decreed by His counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation as vessels made to honour. Wherefore they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called according to God's purpose by His Spirit working in due season. They through grace obey the calling, they be justified freely, they be made sons of God by adoption, they be made like the image of His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy they attain to everlasting felicity.

As the godly consideration of predestination and our Election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members and drawing up' their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God; so for curious and carnal persons lacking the Spirit of Christ to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's predestination is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them either into desperation or into wretchedness of most unclean living no less perilous than desperation.

Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise as they be generally set forth to us in holy Scripture, and in our doings that will of God is to be followed which we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God."

This, then, is the Article, the Scriptural grounds of which we have now to consider. In the first place, let us take the assurance of the great fact of God's choice, that "before the foundations of the world were laid He hath constantly decreed by His counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind."

There is, indeed, unquestionable difficulty in conceiving this. But does not the same difficulty of comprehension exist even with respect to innumerable circumstances and things which either from their frequent repetition or our familiarity with them fail to awaken within us corresponding considerations of their importance, operation or existence. Take, for instance, the existence of light, of the atmosphere, of the circulation of the blood, of the connection of mind and body, or even of the growth of a blade of grass. In which of these do we not encounter problems utterly baffling the most sagacious understanding. And if we then believe the Scriptures, as undoubtedly we do, to have proceeded from Him who is the Author of Nature, may we not well expect to find the same sort of difficulties in them as are found in the constitution of Nature. Indeed, we must regard Revelation itself as a science whose discoveries can find their full development only beyond the grave. And thus taking the assurance that God

has decreed from the foundation of the world (as expressed by the Article) "to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind," difficult though it be to understand, that is, whether God's eternal purpose or decree was made according to what He foresaw His creatures would do, or purely upon an absolute will in order to His own glory, we must, even if we rest solely upon the words of our text, receive it as we are bound to do with all sincerity of heart as the doctrine of Holy Scripture—as the language of Heaven. "Blessed," saith the Apostle, "be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"—as Mediator the Father was His God, and as God and the second person in the blessed Trinity God was His Father, thus, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." In Christ, as the only Mediator between sinful man and an infinitely holy and righteous God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in, through, and by whom alone the believer looks for those spiritual blessings with which God blesses us, particularly those which in the verses following are enumerated and enlarged upon by the Apostle, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." And again, at the eleventh verse, we read "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own

will." Thus, as the Article, so does Scripture set forth the eternal wisdom of Him who hath neither beginning of days nor end of life—who is strong and mighty, with whom nothing is impossible, whose knowledge is perfect, whose understanding is infinite, and whose eyes run to and fro throughout the earth, to show Himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards Him, even the Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, who hath made heaven, the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all things that are therein, and who preserveth them all. Not as some suppose, leaving all things to chance, or again as others, to follow necessarily in one continuous chain of uncertainty as to matter and motion, but by His Providence governing the world, as is evident not only from man being endued with understanding, but birds and beasts who are led to take care of and provide for their young by instinct which serves them instead. The means of man's sustenance are equally remarkable. Meat, drink, and clothing, being void of heat and life, could not preserve life and continue heat unless there were a special providence of God to give virtue unto them. Thus reason alone suffices to teach that things are not left merely to chance, neither do they follow as a matter of course or necessity. But when we turn to the page of inspiration, more weighty evidences, if possible, are found to exist of the infinite love, wisdom and goodness with which He who giveth us "day by day our daily bread" ordereth all things throughout the universe not only on behalf of nations but as concerning individuals. "The Lord hath prepared

his throne in heaven," saith the Psalmist, "and his kingdom ruleth over all." Yes, even to inanimate nature hath He said, "Thus far shalt thou go, but no further," while nations also rise and fall according to His will. As we read in Isaiah (xiv. 26), "This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of Hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?"

Thus also is it with individuals. Nothing befalls us, we are told, but what "the counsel of God had before determined to be done" (Acts iv. 28), therefore we may not wonder, or disbelieve, as if the providence of God were regardless or negligent. "For he that is higher than the highest regardeth," and can order things for the best as well when they cross our desires as when they comply with them. For "all things work together for good to them that love God." Take for instance the case of Joseph, than which there could not be a more striking proof of the preservation and protection which God is pleased to extend to individuals in particular. As Solomon saith, "Many seek the ruler's favour, but every man's judgment cometh from the Lord." From Him who is the Ruler of rulers, and without whose will no man's favour can make us happy, nor frowns tend to increase our misery. "O Lord, I know," saith Jeremiah (x. 23), "that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." "A man's heart," said Solomon, "deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps." And again so far does God interpose on behalf of

individuals, that sometimes we find Him even controlling their dreams, and again at other times keeping them awake that they cannot sleep. Hence then is the principle. And if God's particular providence so watches over us individually, shall we not also believe that He looks to and longs for the salvation of the redeemed, delivering from curse and damnation—in which state all are by nature—those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and bringing them by Christ unto everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. To define or understand the grounds upon which God's decree or choice is fixed may be difficult, and indeed impossible, since whether we consider it as resulting from what God foresaw His creatures would do, or purely upon an absolute will, we are alike met with insurmountable obstacles to any satisfactory conclusion. For if on the one hand we are disposed to set it down to God's absolute and unchangeable decrees of carrying on everything by a positive will of doing everything for His own glory, we surely cannot endure the thought of absolute reprobation or of determining man to sin, or of not giving them the grace necessary to keep them from sin and damnation, without feeling such ideas painfully opposed to those conceptions of His mercy, which are so deeply implanted in the human heart—or, indeed, without regarding them with positive horror.

Again, on the other hand, if we conceive that God's eternal purpose or decree was made according to what He foresaw His creatures would do, and if at the same time it is believed that God governs the world, and that the wills of men are free, then an

equal difficulty presents itself, since the question naturally arises which of these is subject to the other, or how they can be both maintained?

Thus while in exact scriptural language the Article sets forth the great fact that God has decreed to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, but wisely avoids any attempts to define the precise grounds upon which such decree or choice is fixed, we shall do well to regard it as one of those secret things which belong unto the Lord our God, and which the mind of man cannot conceive. But the Article not only sets forth the decree; it also speaks of its execution, showing that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." "Wherefore, they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called according to God's purpose by His Spirit working in due season, they through grace obey the calling, they be justified freely, they be made sons of God by adoption, they be made like the image of His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, they walk religiously in good works, and at length by God's mercy they attain to everlasting felicity."

Thus chosen in Christ, called by His Spirit, aided by His grace, they are justified freely, then sanctified, redeemed, and finally glorified. So that the whole work, began and continued in eternity, proceeds from Him alone, and thus to Him alone be ascribed all praise. "For whom he did foreknow," saith the Apostle (Rom. viii. 29), "he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and

whom he called them he also justified, and whom he justified them he also glorified." And again, "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Thus we find this doctrine of the Church in all points exactly scriptural. And although it is not wise but fruitless to attempt to dive into those ways of the Almighty which are past finding out, yet the framers of the Article have thought fit to add so far as themselves have set forth the same, that the godly consideration of it is profitable, "full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable comfort to such as feel in themselves the working of the spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members, and drawing up their minds to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God." "I know," saith St. Paul to Timothy (2 Tim. i. 12), "whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." And again to the Corinthians (1 Cor. ii. 9), "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God." But again, while the consideration of Predestination and Election is declared to be profitable and "full of

comfort to godly persons," the Article does not omit setting forth the dangers into which it is calculated to lead those who are otherwise minded. It proceeds, "So for curious and carnal persons to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's predestination is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them either into desperation or into wretchlessness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation." And this clause of the Article is, perhaps, as important as any by which it is preceded. Important, not only from the course which it guards us against, but from the inferences which may be gathered therefrom and rendered profitable to all by earnest consideration. How many alas are there, and, indeed, upon very plausible grounds, who regard predestination in so fatally dangerous a view—having such imperfect notions of the nature of God's choice—as to suppose that those whom He hath called may in their life and conduct practise either good or evil without any other consequence ensuing, but that eventually they must be received into everlasting felicity.

Upon very plausible grounds, I say, do they rest such belief; nevertheless, both the Article and the Word of God are against them, and therefore, we must reject their so-called reasoning.

In the Article we read that "they through grace obey the calling," and that "they walk religiously in good works," while St. Paul saith (Rom. viii. 29), "whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." Again (Col. i. 10), "that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work."

As also in our text, "that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." And again (1 Pet. i. 2), "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience." "Wherefore, beloved," as saith St. Peter, in concluding his epistle, "seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." Even as Judas in the instance of the betrayal of our Lord, if we suppose him to have been aware of the express declarations of ancient prophecy relating thereto, might thus have laid the foundation of his crime. How easy is it to conceive some such train of thought as this presenting itself before his mind, when about to perform the awful deed,—“It is decreed, immutably fixed, that the Christ shall be betrayed and crucified; if, therefore, I act the part of the traitor I shall only be effecting what must be brought to pass, I shall only be helping to accomplish what has been determined by God and what is indispensable to the work which Messiah has undertaken? And will it not diminish, if not destroy, the guiltiness of the treason that

it is but instrumental to the accomplishing of God's purposes?" Can any idea as to the workings of the mind of that wretched man, urging him on, appear more probable than thus reasoning with himself?

But, alas, did his guiltiness as the doer of a crime become in the least mitigated because foreknown of God? No! Truly "the Son of Man goeth as it is written of him" said our Lord Himself; "nevertheless," added He, "woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!" How or why should it be otherwise? The crucifixion, indeed, was a determined thing, determined in the counsels of God, and certain to be effected through the instrumentality of men. But this determination, this certainty, left undiminished the guiltiness of the parties who put Christ to death. They obeyed nothing but the suggestions of their own wilful hearts, they were actuated by nothing but their desperate malice and hatred of Jesus, when they accomplished prophecies and fulfilled Divine decrees. Therefore, was it no excuse for them that they were only bringing to pass what had long before been ordained. The whole burden of the crime rested upon the crucifiers, however true it was that Christ must be crucified.

It did not make Judas turn traitor that God foreknew his treason, and determined to render it subservient to His own Almighty ends. Judas was just as free in his treachery, he acted as entirely from his own will and in obedience to his own depraved passions, as if there had been no Divine foreknowledge or no Divine purpose which his treachery might advance. It is true, indeed, that God, foreknowing the sins of which, in spite of the remonstrances of

His Spirit, certain men will be guilty, may determine to make use of those sins and to overrule them to the furtherance of His own gracious ends; but in the perpetration of those sins men are as evidently unaffected by the foreknowledge and preordination of God—they are just as accountable for their actions, and those actions are every jot as free—as if God, who “seeth the end from the beginning,” had been ignorant of what would be done, or had not constructed His purposes on the supposition of certain facts and occurrences.

It did not make Adam fall that God foreknew that he would fall, and arranged, as we may believe, the whole constitution of this creation on the supposition of his falling. Our first parents had precisely the same power of withstanding temptation, and were guilty in precisely the same manner as if their apostasy had been thoroughly unexpected, and therefore thoroughly unprovided for in the counsels of heaven. It was the same with Judas; he was free to betray his Master, and free not to betray Him. God, indeed, knew that he would betray Him, but God’s knowing it did not conduce to his doing it. It did not oblige him to the doing it—it did not even incline him to the doing it. God, indeed, purposed to make use of his treachery, but God’s purposing this did not make the treachery unavoidable—did not make it even certain. It was certain, but the foreknown wickedness of the man and not the foreordained performance of the deed caused the certainty.

Thus, “the Son of Man” was about “to go as it was written of him;” nothing was about to happen to Him which had not been distinctly prearranged; the

part which Judas was about to take was every jot as accurately defined in the Divine plan as if Judas had been simply a passive instrument in the Divine hand ; but nevertheless, "woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed." Woe, likewise, to all those who with Judas hear, but heed not the plain precepts of our Lord. For be it remembered that though Judas probably regarded its being a sort of apology for his treachery, that he was simply doing what God Himself determined should be done, that it was not until after he had heard the assurance, "Woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed ; it had been good for that man if he had never been born," that he went out to accomplish the traitorous purpose which had called forth so tremendous a denunciation. "Beware," then, "lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness." Banish every such thought of the Divine predestination as would extenuate the guilt or lighten the consequences of human transgression.

Every one is free in his actions, and every one is accountable for his actions. God cannot decree the commission of a sin, though God may decree the over-ruling of a sin, the making use of a sin the commission of which has been certified to Him through that foreknowledge which embraces all possible contingencies in all space and in all time.

Finally, although God has kept much of His counsel secret, there is yet enough revealed to satisfy and save. And such are we not only permitted but commanded to search. Not for any purposes of mere curiosity or speculation, but that the great end of all knowledge of Divine Revelation—improvement in

practice—may be thereby advanced. “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. xxix. 29). And, “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God” (Mic. vi. 8). “Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa. lv. 7). “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. xi. 28). “Ho ! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. lv. 1). The invitation is unlimited. “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely” (Rev. xxii. 17). And “If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John ii. 1). To crown all, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,” or, in our Saviour’s own words, “He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark xvi. 16).

Thus, in conclusion, doth the Article wisely set forth the necessity of interpreting God’s promises as they are simply revealed, and that, as the guide of our actions, we should take only that will of God which we have expressly declared unto us in the word of

God. For although the Article itself is in all points exactly Scriptural, yet it necessarily tends to lead those who dare presumptuously to pry into such mysteries as are not fully revealed, because not essential to our belief, into that wretched condition of mind to which we have before adverted. And, therefore, this conclusion in a brief summary of Christian duty must be regarded as a most salutary caution.

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